

Blues Traveler Travelers and Thieves (A&M)

The second album from this New York band of schooled musicians shows them to be more focused, but still overwhelmed by their considerable technique, filling every bit of space, never allowing the songs to breathe. Make no mistake, they're superb, often exciting players and John Popper's soaring harmonica is beyond exceptional. Popper also sings, plays guitar and writes the lyrics which have improved greatly since the first album. There's real emotion and feeling, along with ideas -- perhaps too many -- on songs like "Sweet Pain," "Support Your Local Emperor" and "Sweet Pain", but the overly busy playing interferes and the listener is left impressed but not moved.

--Peter Brown

The Spanic Boys Strange World (Rounder)

This Minnesota father-and-son led band's second album is pretty much a continuation of their first, with more tightly written songs with Everly Brothers-based harmonies and guitars based on rockabilly. There's more of a Byrds sound in the rhythm guitar of "All Alone" and "I Don't Understand," while Ian Spanic plays mighty strange guitar on the title track and they tackle novelty on the mildly humorous "My Head Hurts." While they're great at getting the sound they want, with the exception of "Made Out of Steel," few songs stay with you.

--Peter Brown